

PETROS. 18

THE WONDERFUL BUILDING.

A SERMON,

BY

JOSEPH A. SEISS, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF

"ECCLESIA LUTHERANA," "LECTURES ON THE GOSPELS," ETC., ETC.

Second Edition.

PHILADELPHIA:
THE LUTHERAN BOOK STORE,

117 NORTH SIXTH STREET.

1871.

“Built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy Temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

NOTE TO SECOND EDITION.

THE following discourse was originally preached before the General Council of the Lutheran Church, at its meeting in Pittsburg, in 1869. At the request of those who heard it, a number of copies were then printed and distributed; but it has been out of print for some time.

Recently, the substance of it was republished before the Southwestern Virginia Synod, and its publication officially requested. This request, and repeated inquiries for it, have induced the belief that the issue of a second edition would be acceptable to the Church.

It is accordingly reprinted, in cheap form, that it may be within the reach of all who desire it. The prayer of the author is, that it may be blessed to the comfort and edification of God's people, whithersoever it may come.

PHILADELPHIA, August 31st, 1871.

MERCIFUL GOD!

Cast the bright beams of Thy light upon Thy Church, that it, being instructed by the Doctrine of the blessed Apostles, may so walk in the light of Thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.

Π Ε Τ Ρ Ο Σ.

The Wonderful Building.

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona : for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.—MATT. 16 : 16-19.

To understand these words thoroughly, is to understand Christianity. The dust and smoke of battle are about them, on account of which some might prefer to avoid them ; but they are pregnant with vital doctrine, which dare not be stifled through fear of admitting too much on the one hand, nor allowed to be perverted to the support of falsehood and tyranny, on the other. May God, therefore, give us grace to see the truth, and to encourage and establish ourselves in its holy light !

There is a great and powerful body of men, who rest upon this text for the proof, that our Saviour originally constituted Peter, next to Himself, the centre and foundation of the Church, its chief

pastor, ruler, and prince, with all fulness of power and jurisdiction over all saints; and that this super-apostolic and lordly dignity was ordained to be perpetuated through a line of pontiffs to the end of time. A most extraordinary text it would also be, as highly exalted above all other Scriptures, as it is asserted that Peter was exalted above all other apostles, if any such things were legitimately deducible from it. But this was not the view of it taken in the first ages of the Church. Luther has well said, that Popery never really drew its doctrine on this subject from this passage, but only uses it as a means to thrust upon the world an audacious system, which had its origin somewhere else. He also challenges all the Pope's defenders to produce from the early fathers, a single testimony that the pontiff of Rome is the head, the rock, the official superior, the divinely appointed ruler, of the Church of Christ on earth.* We also have the most solid scriptural reasons for believing, that no such imperial supremacy, or succession, was at all intended by what our Lord here said and did.

The founding of so conspicuous and commanding a power, would necessarily demand a corresponding perspicuity and fulness in the inspired references to it.† But we search the Scriptures in

* Martin Luther to Wenceslaus Link; *Walch* xvii, col. 1756, seq.

† It is a just observation of Augustine: "Credo etiam hinc divinarum eloquiorum clarissima auctoritas esset, si homo sine dispendio promissæ salutis ignorare non posset."

vain for any such references. Popery itself does not pretend to find another text on which to rely upon this point, save this one now before us, in which there is not a word about imperial supremacy or succession.*

If Peter had been divinely invested with such sovereign pre-eminence, it is impossible to conceive that he should never once have asserted, or sought to enforce it. But in all the apostolic history, there is no instance that he ever set up such a claim, or that any one else ever asserted or acknowledged it. On the contrary, Peter, in his Epistles, invariably refers to himself as simply one of the apostles, in no way the superior of the others, and as merely a fellow-elder and servant with them. (1 Pet. 1:16; 3:2; 5:1.) And when the first Christian Council was held, though he was present, it was James that presided, and gave the official judgment of the assembly. (Acts 15.)†

If subordination to Peter had been a part of the original constitution of the Church, then certainly Paul, as a younger and later apostle, would

* Another passage (John 21 : 15-17) is indeed cited by some Romish theologians, who argue that Christ's direction to Peter to *feed* His sheep and lambs, means to govern, rule, and have supreme jurisdiction over the universal church. But this is such a manifest straining of the passage, that Du Pin gives it up as no proof of Peter's supremacy, remarking, that the same power of "teaching all nations" was given to all the apostles alike, and that "the primacy of Peter cannot be collected from these places."

† As Hesychius says: Πέτρος δημηγορεῖ, ἀλλ' Ἰάκωβος νομοθετεῖ. Paul mentions James and John as "pillars" equally with Cephas. Gal. 2:9.

have acknowledged the fact, and yielded the becoming submission. But we find him withstanding Peter to the face, blaming him before the whole Church, and by inspiration declaring himself not a whit inferior to the highest of apostles. (Gal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 11:5.)

Peter himself, very strongly declaims against some of the very things with which it is asserted that Christ here invested him. Against lordship over the Church (1 Pet. 5:3, 4), against a separate hierarchical priesthood above and beyond that which is common to all believers (1 Pet. 2:5-9), against assumptions over the civil magistracy (1 Pet. 2:13-17), and against such honors as are freely given to the Popes (Acts 10:25, 26), he pronounces his unmitigated censures.

The Lord Jesus has also distinctly forbidden the setting up in His Church of such lordly authorities as are claimed for Peter and the Popes. "Ye know," says He, "that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but *it shall not be so among you.*" (Matt. 20:26.) "*Be not ye called Rabbi:* for One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And *call no man your father upon earth:* for One is your Father, which is in heaven." (Matt. 23:8-12.) And when He found them disputing among themselves, which of them should be the greatest in that kingdom of power of which they were vainly dreaming, He called them to Him, and said: "If any man desire

to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." (Mark 9:34.) Very difficult would it be to declare more specifically or fully, the perpetual exclusion from the Church of such differences of authority or power, as that one may lawfully impose his will on others, or rightfully exercise the dominion which is claimed for the Pope and his hierarchy.

And what is here affirmed of Peter, is elsewhere in the Scriptures affirmed equally of all the apostles. There was no office or administration committed to him, which was not granted to the whole apostolic college. Is he pronounced a rock on which the Church was to be built? The new Jerusalem has "*twelve* foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14), and the household of God is "built upon the foundation of the *apostles*." (Eph. 2:20.) Was he to play a conspicuous part in the founding and edification of the new kingdom? Paul says: "According to the grace that is given unto *me*, as a wise master-builder, *I* have laid the foundation." (1 Cor. 3:10.) Was it promised him that what he should bind and loose on earth should be bound and loosed in heaven? To the whole band of apostles it was in like manner promised: "Whatsoever *ye* shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever *ye* shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 18:18.) Was he invested with the power to dispense the pardon of God? Jesus breathed on all of them, and said:

“Whosoever sins *ye* remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins *ye* retain, they are retained.” (John 20:19–23.) And so every command, blessing, immunity, office, or grace here or anywhere conferred upon Peter, we find to be the common possession of all the apostles of our Lord. Nor can it be shown from the Scriptures, from the history of the Church in apostolic times, or from the fathers who lived next after the apostles, that Peter was ever invested, or ever considered to have been invested, with supreme jurisdiction over the rest of the apostles, or with any divine prerogatives above what belonged alike to the whole twelve whom Jesus chose to be the planters and founders of His religion among men.*

We therefore dismiss the Romish dogma, which

* Chrysostom claims that the apostleship, which he assigns in common to the twelve whom Christ chose, *αρχη μεγαστη κορυφη των αρχων*; and that *ζδες υψηλον καθημενον τον αποστολον, και ουδενα προ εκεινου οντα, ουτε ανωτερον*.

Cyprian says: “*Hoc erant utique et cæteri apostoli quod fuit Petrus, pari consortio præditi et honoris et potestatis.*”

So also Isidore: “*Cæteri apostoli cum Petro par consortium honoris et potestatis acceperunt.*”

So also Nicholas de Cusa: “*Scimus quod Petrus nihil plus potestatis a Christo recepit aliis apostolis. Nihil enim dictum est ad Petrum, quod aliis etiam dictum non sit. . . . Ideo recte dicimus, omnes apostolos esse æquales cum Petro in potestate.*”

So also Coelestinus, bishop of Rome, in his letter to the Council of Ephesus.

Hence also Luther: “*So ist kein Apostel grösser oder mehr denn der andere, und hat ihrer keines Person einen Vorzug vor den andern. Derhalben ist es eine recht grobe und unverschämte Lügen, dass der Pabst rühmet, wie St. Petrus der Fürnehmste under den Aposteln gewesen sey, und hat damit seine Obrigkeit und Herrschaft bestätigt.*”

would entrench itself in this text, as a falsehood, contrary to the Scriptures, and without the remotest claim to our respect. A far richer, truer, and more glorious teaching, is that which the Saviour would have us learn from these words.

I. It is here ascertained and established that it was the purpose of Christ to have a Church—an *Ecclesia*—a congregation.

An *Ecclesia* is an assembly of persons. In three instances have our English translators so rendered the word. (Acts 19: 32, 39, 41.) And this is its common and primary signification, underlying all its applications, whether in the New Testament, the Septuagint, or the Greek language in general.*

Hence, when we speak of the Church, in its true Scriptural sense, we must place before our minds a class or assembly of persons, by some par-

* So Luther: "Wissen alle Gelehrten, dass das wort ἐκκλησία, *Ecclesia*, Griechisch, auf Deutsch eine *Versammlung* heisset. Als wir haben 4 Mos. 20: 14: Warum hast [du] ausgeführet *die Gemeinde des Herrn* in die Wüste? Hie sehet ihr, dass nicht sonderne Personen, sondern eine ganze Gemeinde der Kinder von Israel, eine Kirche genennet wird. Daher die Schrift die *Versammlung* Guter und Böser, Weniger und Vieler, eine Kirche nennet. Als Paulus schreibet der Kirchen, die in Corinthe ist, 1 Cor. 1. und Christus gebeut, den Sünder, so zweimal ermahnet, und sich nicht bessert, der Kirchen vorzutragen."—*Walch*, xvii, 2024.

So also Gerhard: "Ecclesia (ab ἐκκαλεῖν) in genere significat coetum et congregationem, unde tribuitur politicis ac profanis coetibus. Ut ergo ecclesiæ coetus sacer distingueretur a profanis coetibus, ideo vocatur ecclesia Dei ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ. Neh. 13: 1. Act. 20: 28. 1 Cor. 1: 2; 10: 32; 11: 16, 22; 15: 9. 2 Cor. 1: 1. Gal. 1: 13. 1 Thess. 2: 14. 2. Thess. 1: 4. 1 Tim. 3: 5, 15. Item ἐκκλησία ἐκ θεοῦ, 1 Thess. 1: 1," etc.—*Loci Theologici*, *Cottæ* ed., xi. 7.

ticular election or calling brought out from the rest of mankind into a body or company to themselves.*

Such a *Church*, or distinct congregation of people, it was Christ's intention to found and establish. This was the object of His mission and ministry: to "purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Tit. 2:14.) "*Building my Church*," is the key-word of His Messiahship, which sounds through all dispensations, and especially in those acts and offices of His described in the New Testament. Indeed, everything that enters into the mediatorial work, from first to last, has been, is, and shall be, as the apostle expresses it, "to unite all things under one head, in union with Christ" (Eph. 1:10, Greek text); "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavens might be made known by [*διὰ, through*] *the Church* the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3:10, 11.)

There is, then, a Church of Christ on earth—a congregation of the Lord. What was so solemnly decreed in the counsels of eternity, could not fail to go into effect. And since Christ was in our world, and satisfactorily to the eternal Father went through with the whole work of His mission, and ascended to the right hand of God for

* So Melanethon: "Quotiescunque de Ecclesia cogitamus, intueamur coetum vocatorum, qui est Ecclesia visibilis, nec alibi electos ullos esse somniemus, nisi in hoc ipso coetu visibili."

the purpose of ministering to the furtherance of what He here begun in person, it must be, that a Church has been founded, and that His wonderful intentions concerning it are being fulfilled.

II. It is here ascertained and established, that this Church is of the nature of an edifice, of which Christ Himself is the Architect.

Not unfrequently do the Scriptures treat of our Saviour as a great Master-Builder. Nay, it is written, that "All things were made by Him ; and without Him was not anything made that was made." (John 1 : 3.) In the beginning He laid out the dimensions of the heavens and the earth, and brought forth creation upon creation, until the stupendous structure, which we call the universe, was finished. Nor did He lay aside His character as an Artificer after the worlds were made. There was, from the commencement, an order and gradation in His works. He began with coarse and chaotic matter, making the lowest elements first ; then the vegetable kingdoms ; then the realms of "moving creatures ;" then the still higher world of humanity, with its mysterious relations to matter on the one side, and to spirit on the other. And when He entered upon the work of redemption, it was still as an Architect, to fashion and erect a yet more exalted structure—a mystic temple—a spiritual house—a building of living materials—an edifice in the sphere of the heavenly, the holy, and the divine—with which He might unite Himself as with nothing

else, and in which His grace and glory might be embodied and realized beyond all that had preceded. This structure is His Church, of which He is the Builder. And whatever agencies have been, or yet may be, mediately employed in the process, it is still His own peculiar work, according to His words: "*I will build My Church.*"

He selected the location of it. Surveying the universe of worlds, He passed by all others, chose this dark planet and fallen race of ours, and resolved that *here* the wonderful achievement should be effected.

He devised the plan of it. The materials to be used, the modes of gathering them, the manner of preparing and uniting them, the place of each piece in the structure, and the entire style, dimensions and uses of the edifice,—everything, is according to His divine purpose and choice. (Rom. 11 : 34–36.)

He employs and commissions all the workmen, and gives them their orders and their wages. Though they be of various grades and gifts—"some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers,"—He has called them, He directs them, and He claims supreme control over them. (Eph. 4 : 11–13.) Not a stone can be laid, not a timber raised, not a pillar erected, not a space filled, not a joint fitted, nor one item in the whole work done, except by His authority, and according to His command.

And, viewed in whatever light, it is absolutely *His Building*, which has no existence without

Him, and which never can be built except as He ordains.

III. It is here ascertained and established, that, in its distinct New Testament form, Christ began the building of His Church with Peter.

The primary foundation of the Church, of course, is always presupposed to be Christ himself. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3 : 11.) But the discourse here is not so much of the deeper foundation of the Church, as of the *building** of it. And this building of the Church began with Simon Peter.

Though this apostle never was the ruling primate of Christendom, he still had a species of primacy. Matthew specifically pronounces Him "the first." (10 : 2.) Four lists of the apostles are given in the Scriptures, and his name occurs first in each of them. (Matt. 10 : 2-4; Mark 3 : 16-19; Luke 6 : 14-16; Acts 1 : 13.) He everywhere appears foremost in the apostolic band, the principal speaker on nearly all occasions, and a sort of mouth and representative of all the rest. The Saviour him-

* The word is *οικοδομήσω*, not *θεμελιώσω*. "A man can be the first building-stone upon the foundation of God, and *in so far* himself a foundation, but no more. As a section of the Church of Christ rests upon a preacher or missionary whose natural qualifications and new nature together were ordained for this, so upon the apostolical labors of Peter was the whole at first built. But such a foundation-stone is for this reason no head, no prince and ruler over the others, or over the entire house, for it is built on his *ministry*, not on his commands."—*Stier*.

self frequently manifested a particular respect for him, and seemed to single him out as the one to whom he most frequently directed His addresses. But this is to be accounted for on quite other grounds than those which Papists assume.

The gifts and qualities of Peter, as a man, were such as would necessarily put him forward more prominently than either of the original twelve. He was of a warm, earnest, courageous and impulsive nature, and, of all the apostles, in apprehension the quickest, in spirit the boldest, in speech the readiest, in zeal and fervency the most active, in aggressiveness the most resolute.

He was also one of the oldest in years—a married man, and the head of a business partnership, before he was called to follow Christ.

He was also one of the very earliest of Christ's disciples, and from the first had been the aptest and most attentive of His pupils.

Such being the facts in the case, it is hardly possible that he could otherwise than take a position of particular conspicuity in the apostolic company, though having no specific ordination to that effect.*

In every gathering, also, there must needs be one who is on the spot first, to whom all who

* Augustine remarks: "Petrus — natura unus homo erat, gratia unus christianus, abundantione gratia idemque primus apostolus." And again: "Ipse enim Petrus in apostolorum ordine primus, in Christe amore promptissimus, sæpe unus respondet pro omnibus." So, also, Basil: "'Ο παντῶν τῶν μαθητῶν προκρίθεις.'"

come afterwards are added. So in every structure, there is of necessity something with which it commences, which goes down first, and which everything else follows. The same necessity existed in the beginning of the building of the Church. The Saviour was about to ordain twelve men from among His various disciples, in and by whom His congregation was to be established. Twelve names could not be pronounced at once, and all were not equally advanced. Some one had to be named and ordained before the others, and some one had necessarily to be the first to enter the new office and organization. And, judging from the qualities and attainments of the men chosen, and from Christ's method in general, there was every reason to suppose that Peter would be the one. And so it actually turned out.* He was the very first man on earth to attain to mature discipleship in the new economy, the first invested with the apostleship, and the first to preach the Gospel after Christ's ascension. And this primacy over all men, Simon Peter had, and must forever retain. It was not a primacy of government and jurisdiction, either transferable or intransferable,

* So Hilary : " *Primus credidit, et apostolatus est princeps.*"—So, also, Cyprian : " *Quem primum Dominus elegit.*"—"Simon was the first to recognize and acknowledge, with his whole soul, and with the energy of living faith, the great central mystery, the fundamental article of Christianity, the Messiahship of his Master ; the absolute union of the divine and the human, and the all-sufficient fulness of life, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth."—Dr. SCHAFF's Hist. Apost. Church.

but simply a primacy of precedence, in a company of equals in office, based upon his eminence in natural gifts, and his greater forwardness in Christian development. And as the building of the Christian Church began in and with the apostles, and the college of apostles began in and with Peter, so the building of the Church began with Peter. He was the first in the edifice, the first stone laid, and hence the starting-point from which the whole structure has been building ever since. It was a high and unalterable distinction, but only an historical one. It was a precedence in confession, not in order or rulership, nor in any way constituting him the lord of those who became confessors after him. Having been the first to confess Christ, and to preach Christ after the dispensation of the Spirit, he could never afterwards be any other than the first, in this sense. But it does not follow that, because you confessed and preached Christ before I did, you are my master and lord, or that I am officially your inferior.

From this point of view it is, that we are to find what in these words was peculiar to Peter, and what in them is common to all apostles, and to the whole Church. The distinctive Church of Christ was just receiving its initial foundation. Peter, in advance of all others, had come to that vigor of confession in which that Church was to take its being and its upbuilding. As the first matured member—the first *Petros*—it was promised him to be the *Petra* with whom the doors of the new king-

dom should open, as on the day of Pentecost, and subsequently among the Gentiles. Beyond this there was nothing peculiar to him. Of course, he who was thus historically the first, could never be the second, third, or fifth. But, for the very reason that he was the first, all that was said to him, *mutatis mutandis*, was said to all the apostles, and to the whole Church; for, until there was a second, he was the whole Church. And as neither the Church nor the apostleship was to be restricted to one man, so neither were the official qualities and powers to which the Saviour refers. The accession of others to the same membership and confession, implied their accession to a common office. Hence, the blessing here pronounced, is the blessedness of every *Petros*, apostle, and true member of the Church. The rockship, on which the building of the Church was to proceed, is the same in nature that pertains to every apostle, minister, confessor, and member in the Christian congregation. The keys promised, are the common property of the Church's ministerial office, and necessarily inhere in it as a witnessing body, no matter at what remove from the one who first exercised them. By the time the Saviour had occasion to speak of these keys again, they are found in the possession of others in common with Peter. All these things were *his* exclusively, only so long as he was the only embodiment of the new life, and the Church had no existence beyond himself. They were spoken to him particularly, because he was the

only representative the Church then had, and was in fact all of the Church that had yet been built. So soon as others were built in as he had been, the same benediction, the same rockship, and the same power to bind and loose, became theirs also.* The process began with him. He was the first matured confessor; and, as such, the first in the apostleship, and in the formation of the Church. He was the first to preach the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, and in this way, the first, to exercise the power of the keys, and to begin the building of the Church. But the process did not stop with him. It has been going on to this present. And its results are the same in kind now as in his case.† The only difference between him and others is, that he was the first of the series, and so had an accidental relation to the whole, which is peculiar to him. He was the earliest member the Church had, the first stone that was laid when the building commenced, and the first to open the door for the building in of others.‡

* “Numquid istas claves Petrus accepit, et Johannes, et Jacobus non accepit et cæteri apostoli? . . . Quod illi datum est, ecclesiæ datum est. Ergo Petrus figuram gestabat ecclesiæ, ecclesia corpus est Christi.”—*Augustine*.

† “Alle Christen sind Petri um der Bekenntniss willen.”—*Luther*.

‡ “Sic enim et exitus docet. In ipso ecclesia exstructa est, id est, per ipsum. Ipse clavem imbuat (Acts 2). Ipse denique primus in Christi baptismo, reseravit aditum cœlestis regni, quo solvuntur alligata retro delicta, et alligantur quæ non fuerint soluta, secundum veram salutem.”—*Tertullian*.

“Petra enim dicitur, eò quod primus in nationibus fidei fundamenta posuerit.”—*Ambrose*.

‘Peter in his new spiritual character, appears as the supporter of

IV. It is here ascertained and established, that the Church's acquisitions are conditioned by her Confession. Peter confessed himself rightly, and it was that confession of his, living in his soul, and speaking from his lips, that constituted him a Christian *Petros*, and in virtue of which Christ pronounced him the *Petra* on which His Church was to be built.

There are some who propose to have nothing to do with creeds and confessions, and think themselves the better Christians for it. But, in the light of this text, they are radically at fault. The first rock that was planted in the building of the Church, became such by reason of a particular confession, and by that alone; and it is only through a like confession of the same creed, that any one can be joined to him as a member of the

Christ's great work; Jesus Himself is the Creator of the whole, Peter, the first stone of the building."—*Olshausen*.

"Peter was the first of those *foundation-stones* (Eph. 2 : 20; Rev. 21 : 14), on which the living temple of God was built: this building itself beginning on the day of Pentecost by the laying of *three thousand living stones* on this very foundation."—*Alford*.

"In a primary and personal sense, St. Peter, in reward for his good confession of the true faith in Christ, received and exercised the power of the keys; after the ascension he was the first among the apostles to admit into the Church, by the ministry of the word and sacraments, the Jewish converts (Acts 2 : 14–38); and also Cornelius, the first fruits of the Gentiles (Acts 10 : 34–48); and Peter himself notes the fulfilment of Christ's promise to himself (Acts 15 : 7). In a secondary and general sense, the promise is made to the Church, and especially to all who hold and profess the faith of Peter, and are called to the office of dispensing the word and sacraments, and of exercising the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5 : 18, 19). To this effect are the testimonies of the Fathers."—*Wordsworth*.

See also Smalcald Articles, *De Pot. et Prim. Papæ*, ix.

same body. If we confess not with the Church, we cannot be of the Church. Neither is it possible for us to become the means or agents of bringing others in as living stones in the mystic temple of God, except through the confession of what he confessed whose confession brought him in.*

Nor is this confession a mere human thing, as some erroneously conceive. Peter spoke human words, but those words embodied Divine truth, and divinely-wrought convictions. Flesh and blood had not revealed it unto him. No suggestions, impulses, or reasonings of man, can ever make a Christian. People may think, and plan, and make what attempts they will, but no Simon can ever become a *Petros* in the building of grace by his own endeavors. There must first go forth a Divine power—a revelation from the Father—to render such a transformation possible. The Christ had come and spoken to Simon, and showed His works of wonder, and given forth ray after ray of spiritual illumination, and begot in him the conviction of His real character and mission, and so wrought the same in his inmost soul, that “Simon Peter answered and said, THOU ART THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.” And shall we call the fruits of

* “Der Kirche wird allein durch das Evangelium (ich rede nicht von dem geschriebenen Evangelio, sondern von dem, das in leiblicher Stimme geführt wird), empfangen, gemacht, ernähret, geboren, ezogen, geweiht, bekleidet, gezieret, gestärket, bewapnet und erhalten. Zugleich, das ganze Leben und Wesen der Kirchen stehet in dem Wort Gottes, als Christus sagt Matt. 4 : 4, ‘In einem jeden Wort, das ausgehet von dem Munde Gottes, lebet der Mensch.’ ”—*Luther*.

such a process *human*? Though the words be man's words, and though used by a man to express the convictions of a man, Divinity is in them. Jesus says: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." We thus reach what is the true character of the Church's Confession. It is nothing more or less than *man's divinely begotten answer to the revelation of God*.

And the formation of that answer in the convictions and lively apprehensions of the soul, the fashioning of the heart and life to it, and the bringing of the whole man to rest in it as the pole-star of his being, are what make of him a member of the congregation of the Lord. Repentance, faith, regeneration, holiness, eternal life, all that enters into one's salvation, we find embraced in this. It was so in Peter's case, and in him began the work of which all other instances of planting in the congregation of Christ are but the continuation.

Hence, also, the confession which Peter made, is forever the one, true, and only Christian confession. The Church is one, and hence that by which Simon came to be a *Petros* and a *Petra* in it, must be the same by which all others come to be what he was. There is but one living God, and He has but one Son, and that Son is Jesus of Nazareth, and that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ—the Messiah—the centre and substance of all prophecy and all Divine revelation. This was the Church's

confession when as yet it had but one official member. Jesus pronounced it Divine—revealed and wrought into Peter's heart, not by flesh and blood, but by the eternal Father Himself. His sacred benediction was given to it. Peter was accepted and ordained as the first apostle and member of the Church, in view of his having it in him as the controlling persuasion of his soul. And through the same, through all time, Jesus declares it to be His purpose to build the whole Church to its completion.

There can, therefore, be no other Christian confession, and no Church, or increase of the Church, except as this confession is wrought into men, and made to live in their hearts, speak from their lips, and fashion their lives.* More extended expressions of it have grown up in the Church's Spirit-moved history; but they are the same identical confession, only with its contents more fully evolved, guarded, defended, and distinguished from error, and from what is not of it. The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the great confessions of the sixteenth century, all, as to their substance and contents, are no more and no less than this selfsame confession of Peter. The giving out of symbolical books began with him, and in him was blessed of

* "In these words the whole Christian doctrine, the whole Gospel, is expressed. Peter, his companions in labor, and the great apostle of the Gentiles himself, subsequently teach nothing but what is comprised in these few words."—*Verney, late Lutheran Pastor in Paris.*

Jesus, and pronounced to be of God. As to the more remote details, and the nicer distinctions, many Christians may not always be able to appreciate them. Infirmities of human language may also attach to the expressions of them. But, as to the great confessional substance of these testimonies, they are the Church's true and only faith, by the hearty confession of which Christ's congregation began to be formed, by the hearty co-confession of which it is and must be built, and without which there is no Church of Christ, and can be none, let men rant and babble as they please.

People sometimes say to us: Preach Christ, and let your creeds and confessions go. But, there is no Christ save the Christ of the Church's confession; and there is no preaching of Christ but the preaching of the contents of that confession. It was this divinely-begotten confession, living and sounding in Peter, which our Lord pronounced the *Petra* — the rock — on which He purposed to build His congregation; and there is no other way of building it.* Any so-called church which is without a confession, somehow given out, or which cannot show us in its confession the true Christ, Son of the living God, as confessed by Peter, does not embrace or rest on the Rock, and is not Christ's

* "Das Bekenntniss ist der Fels, darauf Petrus und alle Petri gebauet sind."—*Luther*.

Hence, also, the exhortation even of one of the Popes: "In vera fide persistite, et vitam vestram in petra ecclesiæ, hoc est, in confessione b. Petri."—*Gregory the Great*.

Church, give it what name you like. It required Simon Peter's heartfelt confession to put him into the congregation and office of the saints. It was by the hearing of his confession, and their heartfelt concurrence in it, that his fellow-disciples came into the same. It was only by a like hearing and a like concurrence that all saints have since been "added to the Church." And there is no Church where that confession is not heard, received, preached, and made to live and speak in men, as it lived and spoke in Peter. There may be "the form of godliness"—external Baptism, confession of Christ with the lips, zeal in what purports to be His service, mechanical participation of His body and blood, great learning, mighty oratory, the highest official place, and outward succession direct from the apostles themselves—but, without the faith which Peter confessed, and the new-creating embrace of the Christ as embraced by that confession, there is no true *Ecclesia* of the Lord, and no membership in it. For it is the Confession of the Church which conditions everything that is of it or in it; and without that Confession, transforming the heart and life to itself, all the religious enthusiasm in the world, all the votes of the sacred college, promotion even to an apostolic chair, or investment with the crown of crowns, can never put a man into the true congregation of the Lord.

V. It is here ascertained and established, that

the Church, in this world, is appointed to a career of trial and suffering. "The gates of hell" are "against it." Whatever may be comprehended under these "gates of hell," they stand for great evil powers, and ever serve a hostile purpose.

The Church has but one entrance, and puts forth her saving power in one way. Hell has many "gates," and plies its destructive forces in many forms.

There is the gate of ever-abounding worldliness, flooding Heaven's congregation with earth's contaminating fashions and passions, softening down the ruggedness of piety to the respectabilities of social style, muzzling the pulpit against interference with genteel vices, and paralyzing the Gospel by attempts to marry the service of God with the worship of Mammon.

There is the gate of carnal ambition, by which Simon Magus, Diotrophes, and others of their class, were entrapped, and made a prey to the destroyer, even while the apostles yet lived. Nor can tongue tell the strifes, and smoke, and miseries, and spoliations of the temple of God, which have proceeded from this source in all ages since.

There is the gate of heresy and false doctrine, which carried off Hymeneus and Philetus, spotted the apostolic feasts of charity, tracked the missionary journeys of Paul with dissensions, troubled and befouled every church addressed in the Apocalypse, transmuted the professed body of Christ into a corrupting carcass overlaying and defiling

the mediæval ages, raised schismatic altars in every land, and impregnated the whole atmosphere of modern times with deadly soul-poisons.

There is the gate of religious indifferentism and false catholicity, with its gruel-and-water creed, its pious deprecations of a distinctly spoken faith, its ecclesiastical free-love, and its reduction of the profession of the cross to a pliant sentimentalism, as debauching as it is characterless.

And there is the gate of unbaptized learning, philosophy falsely so-called, skeptical science, lauded and sought by multitudes, under the guise of superior wisdom ignoring and betraying the faith, turning away the hearts of men from the truth, obscuring the only saving light, poisoning the fountains of knowledge, and often transforming the instructions of the pulpit itself into a mere modernized heathenism.

And there is the gate of perverted ecclesiasticism, linking the Lord's gracious promises to orders of men, functions, ceremonies, institutions, seats, jurisdictions, everything but the true thing, and denying salvation to all who do not conform to its establishment, specialties, and superadditions.

And there is the gate of persecution, whence, in ages past, the god of this world sent forth his bloody messengers with fagot and sword to make havoc of the Church, and to destroy it from the earth; and whence the same old demon spirit still issues his emissaries to sneer down and hinder obedience to the truth, to thrust at, and stab, and

disable the faithful confessors of it, and to defame and bring under the ban whatever savors of genuine godliness.

From all these, and many other gates, the congregation of the Lord is ever tried, assailed, and forced to contend. And wider and more potent and distressing than all, is the gate of death, the literal gate of *Hades*, dragging to silence and the grave every new generation of believers that is raised up. Prophets, apostles, and confessors, the noblest, the greatest, and the best, all, sooner or later, are swept away. "Your fathers, where are they? The prophets, do they live forever?" From the beginning of the Church till now, no sooner has one become fully ripe in Christian attainment, and rightly equipped for usefulness, and advanced in the confidence of men as a faithful and trusty leader and champion of the Lord's hosts, but disease is upon him, or the weight of years and labors, and he is compelled to retire and die! The men of God who wrote your Scriptures; the heroic apologists who defended them before emperors and kings; the Chrysostoms who thrilled the armies of Jesus by their golden words; the heaven-illuminated Reformers who brought out God's children from the cruel thralldom of those who had sworn to be their comforters; the men who taught you your first lessons in salvation; even the brother under whose gentle presidency you transacted your last year's business;—what has become of them? The gates of Hades have snatched them away, and

dissolved their very bones! And we who are yet here to do what little we can for the guidance and edification of the Church,—what are we, but weak pilgrims already far on the way to a like end! And from this gate alone the Church on earth is ever a Rama, with the voice of lamentation and weeping, and great mourning, in it—a Rachel weeping for her children because they are not.

Unto all these adversities is the Church on earth appointed. It is but a little flock amid a wilderness full of savage beasts—a lamb among remorseless wolves—a feeble ship in the waves and storms of a mighty sea—a faint and friendless one, whipped through the streets of the world, with a crown of thorns upon his brow, and a crushing cross upon his back! Such has been its estate from the beginning, and such shall be its earthly estate as long as this present world shall last.*

VI. But still, it is here ascertained and established, that the Church shall never perish. Though ever assailed, and ever suffering, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

For eighteen dreary centuries has the feeble congregation of the Lord been contending with the powers of darkness, oppressed with the anxieties, labors, privations, watchings and perils of

* “Denn wir müssen immer des heilige Creuz haben, dass ihr das mehrere Theil sind, die die Christen verfolgen.”—*Luther*.

“Scimus item, quod ecclesia in hoc vita subjecta sit cruci, et primum post hanc vitam glorificabitur, sicut Paulus inquit, Oportet nos similes fieri imaginis filii Dei.”—*Melancthon*.

unceasing battle with the devil, the world, the flesh, with hoary and savage superstition, relentless unbelief, and a thousand combinations framed for her overthrow. In every age has her strength been tasked to the utmost, the blood of her champions made to flow, and the lives of thousands upon thousands of her children sacrificed in her defence. Hell rose up against her apostles, and sought to drown her in their blood. The sword of the Cæsars was drawn against her, and the whole Roman empire saturated with the life-blood of the saints. Many a time did it seem as if it could not be possible for her to survive. Never a victory was gained, but the warfare was renewed in other forms, the struggle made more desperate, and the foe more subtle and more fierce. Fresh fears, and perils, and antagonisms, came with every successive age. Often the bravest and most hopeful were rendered faint, and fevered, and delirious, and leaned sorrowfully on each other, exhausted and ready to perish, compelled oftentimes to hide away in caves, and catacombs, and secluded places of the wilderness, homeless, penniless, and with no visible help under heaven. And from the crucifixion of her Lord till now, she has never ceased to tread the same path He trod, drinking the bitter waters of affliction, sharing with Him the woes of the *via dolorosa*, and crying her *miserere* amid sorrows from which there was no deliverance. But in her greatest extremities and straits, the Saviour's words never once ceased

to be true: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

If the Church had been built upon the Popes, this could not be said. Where sin overcomes, there the gates of hell prevail. Where men yield to falsehood and to wickedness, there the powers of hell triumph. And where the foundation fails, there the superstructure must needs fail also. And many a time have the Popes proven that they were not so much as of the Church, much less the foundation and stem of it. Were not Liberius, Vigilus, and Honorius heretics? Were not Gregory VII, Alexander VII, Innocent XI, Clement XI, bad men, governed by base passion and carnal ambition? And were not Innocent VI, Sixtus IV, Alexander Borgia, and John XXIII, given to many infamous and even monstrous vices? With each of them the gates of hell successively prevailed against the Church, if in them it had its centre and foundation. But not on Popes, nor yet on Simon as a man, but on the confessed Christ, as He lives and speaks in the new-created nature of those who really receive His word and believe on His name, is the Church founded; and of such alone it consists.* And against this Church the gates of hell never have prevailed, and never will prevail.

Things often look very discouraging and sad.

* "*Ecclesia, quatenus impura, non sit Ecclesia, etsi vera ac pura Ecclesia sub illa.*" — Carpzov.

The defections are so many, the adversities are so great, the trustworthiness of men is so small, that we are sometimes at our wits' ends to see or fancy whence the requisite help shall come. With all the boasted successes of Christianity in modern times, when we come to test things by the standard of the word of God, we are compelled to admit, that the true congregation of the Lord is still what the Saviour called it: *a little flock*. To this moment we hear the shouts of the enemy, that her batteries are becoming feeble, that her vitality is giving way, that her foundations are ready to fall, and that her end is near at hand. Even some who once stood up bravely for her, have quite deserted to the foe. Again and again the leaders, to whom she looked, have played false, and betrayed her in the hour of trial. Many of her most loving and untiring friends have become sick and distracted with the unequal strife, laid themselves down upon the earth, and gone to sleep for very grief. And darker still may grow the situation. Rome is renewing her inward vigor by her outward adversities, receiving new and numerous accessions from the ranks of her former combatants, and having her way smoothed for her by the empty negations and unchurchliness of the bickering sects. Infidelity in its Protean forms, latitudinarianism, false doctrine, and "damnable heresies," are augmenting, and may continue to augment. Passion, lawlessness and schism may go forward with all the increased vigor which the

symptoms indicate. Persecution may revive, with all its ancient thirst for blood. And the time may return when the heads of men shall be severed from their bodies for their fidelity to the faith. But the words of Jesus shall never cease to be true: "*The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*"

Nay, the burden of many a great and precious promise is, that just when the extremity is greatest, the distress the deepest, and the enemy most confident, there shall come a shout from heaven (1 Thess. 4: 14-18); and the prostrate ones shall start up with new animation; and there shall be a bending forward of eager eyes and open ears, and a mysterious transfiguration of anxious countenances, and a lifting up of exulting exclamations: *Lo! this is our God! We have waited for Him! Halleluia! WE ARE SAVED!* And the saintly myriads who have sunk in death shall stir in their graves, shake off their ashen garments, and come forth in immortal beauty, singing: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever!" And through all creation's pulses shall the victory thrill the fulfilment of the Master's words: "THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT!" *

* Dr. Lange has very properly remarked, that "the leading thought in these words, is the triumph of *life over death*, of the kingdom of the *resurrection* over the usurped reign of the kingdom of *Hades*."

VII. Finally, it is here ascertained and established, that a sublime consummation is preparing for the Church. If the gates of hell cannot overthrow it, no other powers will; and if it stands, it must also reach the end for which it stands. With all the hindrances and distractions that are upon it, the congregation of the Lord is being built, and the purpose of its great Architect is being accomplished. The progress may be invisible, and, to the outward eye, there may be no signs of advance; but the work is going on, and must go on, to its consummation. The Builder is God, and what He undertakes succeeds.

When the temple of Solomon was built, the mountains of Lebanon, the quarries of Tyre, the mines of Ophir, and the islands of the sea, were laid under contribution for what was needed. The artificers of many nations were made to work together for the one common result. And so all lands are being searched for believing souls, and workmen, who know not each other's language, are gathering, and dressing, and fitting the "lively stones" for the "spiritual house" of salvation. Amid all the rampage of schism, and heresy, and falsehood, and death, the mystic walls are rising. The world itself is preserved, and all its revolutions and changes are shaped, only that God may gather out of it the jewels of which those walls are being built. And He who presides unseen over the process, will not relinquish His undertaking until the whole design is complete.

And when once the work has received the finishing touches of His almighty grace, who shall tell the magnificence of its proportions, or the fulness of its splendors! Then first shall be uncovered what the infinite God has been all these ages in making! Then first shall the universe behold the sublimest masterpiece of creative goodness! Then first shall be displayed the ripened and combined results of all the centuries of sufferings, toils, conflicts, labors and prayers of all the workers in all the dispensations! And on the hills and plains of heaven shall stand up a congregation, which has been thousands of years in gathering, flashing with the glory of God and of the Lamb!

Does any one covet a glance at that finished work? From a mountain great and high the seer of Patmos saw it, and was commanded to write the vision for the comfort of the churches. It rose before him like a mighty city, as broad as long, and as high as wide. It was bright as a crystal, and full of the glory of Godhead. Angels were stationed at its gates of pearl, and apostolic names were in its jewelled foundations. It was of pure gold, like unto clear glass; and its walls were jasper. No need of sun or moon was there; for the glory of the Lord did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof.

Its bulwarks all stood bonded
With amethyst unpriced;
The saints its glorious fabric,
And its Corner-stone **THE CHRIST.**

But far beyond all words of man, or images of earthly thought or speech, shall be the glory of the completed Church, when, to Himself, the blessed Lord shall present it, "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." And if the Morning Stars had occasion to sing together when the young world rolled from its Maker's hand, what a gulf-stream of adoring praise and gladness will pour through eternity, over the completion of this long-building city of souls, ransomed by the Saviour's blood, new-created by His word and Spirit, and forever joined to Him in the royalty and dominion of eternal empire!

Happy Zion!

What a favored lot is thine!

Fathers and Brethren, these are mighty truths. They give the underlying explanation of all Scripture, all providence, all history, all duty. They throw a light across the perturbed and conflicting state of things in this present world, without which all is confusion and darkness. They disclose to us the plan of God running through all the checkered fortunes and experiences of men, nations, peoples, and the race. They give the apology for our being here in this capacity, and for the pledges we have given to each other and to God, to stand by the Confessions of the Church, and to witness for them with all the power that is in us. And they furnish us, moreover, with the data, direct from Christ himself, by which to as-

certain where we are, and how to steer. Let us not fail to profit by them.

Christ has planted His congregation in the world. He means that we should be built in it, sharing the Petrine blessing, the Petrine office, and the Petrine prerogatives. For this, indeed, He has been dealing with us all our lives, and given us all our privileges. For this He called and sent Peter, and Paul, and Luther, before us, and wrought all the great histories connected with them and their cause. For this He has given us knowledge of His truth, and of what He did in the times of old, in the course of many generations. For this His name was called upon us in Baptism, the hand of benediction laid upon us in Confirmation, and the offices we hold committed to our trust. For this we have the written Scriptures in our houses, and the voice of His Gospel sounding from His confessors in every city and in every town. And if we fail to be living stones, joined to the living Rock, in the living temple, of the living God, it can only be because we do not come unto Him that we might have life. Let us see to it that we be His servants indeed.

Nor should we forget that, in calling us to such exalted place and office, the Saviour means also that we shall evince our fitness for it the same as Peter did. He means that we should be joined to the congregation of His people, by a soul-felt and unflinching confession of the one faith, in the one Christ, the only Son of the only God. Without

this faithfulness and confession, Simon was not *Petros*, had not the blessing, was not a foundation for the inbuilding of others, and had no keys to bind and loose for the kingdom of heaven. Neither can we have part in such sacred offices and powers, except by the same faithfulness in the same confession. Let us see to it, then, that no fears of man, or motives of earthly gain or loss, cause the words to falter on our tongues, or to fail from our hearts. It is the truth, the honest confession of the truth, the firm and everlasting clinging to the truth, that makes men saints, and apostles, and princes in the house of the Lord,—rocks of strength to weak and drifting souls,—officers of God to open unto men the doors of the celestial kingdom. Above all things, therefore, in order to answer to the calling with which we have been called, does it need to be our constant and most absorbing aim, rightly to know, embrace, confess, and live “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” And to this may God help us, as He helped His saints of old!—AMEN AND AMEN.

